

October 14, 2004

Docket Management System
U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Room PL-401
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Re: NPRM on Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards; Side Impact Protection
and Side Impact Phase-In Reporting Requirements
Docket No. NHTSA-2004-17694

**COMMENTS SUBMITTED BY
RECREATION VEHICLE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION**

I. Background

For the reasons stated herein, the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association, Inc. ("RVIA") endorses the approach taken by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration ("NHTSA") to exclude motorhomes and vehicles with raised roof designs from proposed vehicle-to-pole test requirements. These comments are submitted in response to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking ("NPRM") published in the Federal Register on May 17, 2004 (69 FR 27990 et seq.) by NHTSA regarding proposed amendments to Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards ("FMVSS"); Side Impact Protection and Side Impact Phase-In Reporting Requirements.

RVIA is a national trade association representing manufacturers of conversion vehicles ("CVs"), and recreation vehicles ("RVs"). RVIA's members produce over 90% of all CVs and nearly 99% of all RVs sold in the United States. At present, there are 43 CV members of RVIA, with an approximate annual production in 2003 of 38,800 multi-stage produced van conversions. In addition, 12 RVIA member RV manufacturers produce some small motorhome models with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 4,536 kilograms (10,000 pounds) or less. The approximate aggregate annual production of these Type B motorhomes in 2003 was 1,950 units, and the vast majority of these have raised roofs. Other types of RVs, such as Type A and C motorhomes, folding camping trailers, fifth wheel trailers, travel trailers and truck campers are not affected by this NPRM.

II. Proposed Side Impact Tests

Proposed side impact test requirements of FMVSS 214 would require all passenger vehicles with a GVWR of 10,000 pounds or less (excluding certain vehicles) to comply with a new

vehicle-to-pole test. According to NHTSA, compliance would likely require installation of side air bags or inflatable curtains installed at the roofline. The exiting moving barrier test would be upgraded, but remain applicable to LTVs with a GVWR of 6,000 pounds or less.

The agency proposes to exclude from the pole test motorhomes, vehicles equipped with wheelchair lifts, vehicles with raised roof or altered roofs and certain other vehicles and vehicles with specific equipment and features. The exclusions were proposed in recognition of various unusual features these vehicle have that would cause compliance with test requirements to be either too difficult or impossible.

RVIA applauds NHTSA's exclusion of these unique and specialized vehicles, which are desired and/or needed in the marketplace. RVIA is appreciative of the agency's recognition that the excluded vehicles have special uses or features that would be incompatible with the proposed requirements.

III. Compliance certification by Multi-Stage manufacturers

NHTSA is aware of the difficulties faced by multi-stage manufacturers in complying with dynamic crash test requirements. Multi-stage CV manufacturers rely heavily on availability of "pass-through" certification from incomplete vehicle manufacturers. As dynamic test requirements become more complex, it is reasonable to anticipate that incomplete vehicle manufacturer's guidance for "pass-through" certification of air bag restraint systems would be more restrictive; and might in fact be so restrictive as to preclude subsequent stage manufacturers from making any changes in areas adjacent to the new air bags or inflatable curtains.

NHTSA is also aware that small volume, small business CV manufacturers do not have the resources or technical expertise to utilize certification options available to large manufacturers including engineering analysis, computer modeling, or dynamic testing. Consortium testing is not a viable option because of the many different interior variations produced by CV manufacturers, who often build multiple models on several different chassis.

IV. Compliance Date Phase-In for Multi-Stage Manufacturers

RVIA supports NHTSA's proposal to allow CV manufacturers and alterers to certify compliance at the end of the phase-in period. NHTSA recognizes the difficulty CV manufacturers face when chassis manufacturers have control over when chassis certification would be phased-in. However, often there is insufficient time provided for CV development and certification when chassis and information are not available from the chassis manufacturer until the last possible moment before the compliance date. For this reason, CVs should be allowed an additional year (until September 1, 2012 in the example cited) for compliance certification.

V. Conclusion

Small volume multi-stage CV manufacturers and alterers face unique problems when new dynamic testing certification requirements are imposed upon them. They are at the mercy of chassis suppliers for timely assistance with “pass-through” certification, information and guidance for completion and vehicles. Without “pass-through” certification CV manufacturers have no practicable means to comply with dynamic testing requirements.

Given the lack of control by subsequent stage manufacturers over when compliance requirements are phased-in by chassis manufacturers, an additional year is required for CV manufacturers to certify compliance.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the NPRM.

Sincerely,

Bruce A. Hopkins
Vice President, Standards and Education